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The Unsatisfied

By Dan Kurzman

Castro and the Exiles

SOVIET PREMIER Nikita S. Khrushchev's conditional decision to dismantle "offensive" missile bases in Cuba may result in embarrassing situations for both Russia and the United States.



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Moscow faces the possibility of a split with Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, who has demanded far more stringent concessions on the part of the United States than has Khrushchev as the price for settling the present crisis.

Washington may have considerable difficulty explaining to the Cuban exiles based on American territory—who have already started complaining—that a U. S. invasion of Cuba, on which most of them have counted, is now out of the question in view of President Kennedy's pledge to this effect.

It is not clear what the U. S. position will be toward the question of attacks that Cuban exiles may launch on their own against Castro.

"Any compromise the United States makes with the Russians is wrong," Antonio Varona, a top leader of the CIA-supported Cuban Revolutionary Council told me last night. "It would be as disastrous as the Bay of Pigs failure. Cubans will continue to fight Castro regardless of American policy."

KHRUSHCHEV based his compliance with U. S. demands for dismantling the bases solely on the President's promise to lift the blockade and to refrain from invading Cuba. Mr. Kennedy also expressed confidence

that other nations of the Hemisphere would agree to these terms.

But Castro, in a radio statement, added the demands that the United States cease all "subversive activities," "pirate attacks," and "violations" of Cuban naval and air space, as well as abandon the U. S. naval base at Guantanamo.

It is conceivable that Khrushchev and Castro secretly agreed to present two sets of conditions, possibly so that if Russia did not carry out its agreement it could argue that Cuba simply would not cooperate, and could not be made to comply in view of its sovereign status.

But some U. S. sources said they tended to believe at this time that Castro was acting on his own, perhaps in bitter reaction to Khrushchev's retreat at the expense of Cuban security and pride. On the basis of this theory, Moscow acted unilaterally without more than informing its Cuban ally of its decision.

IN ANY EVENT, Khrushchev issued his statement only in his own name, and not in conjunction with Castro, placing the Cuban Government in an embarrassing position. The Cuban leader, it is speculated, therefore tried desperately to extricate himself from a humiliating position by setting his impossible conditions.

For Fidel Castro, though a Communist, is first of all an egotist, according to people who know him well. He is regarded as a man who does not permit himself to be pushed around, even by the world's top Red—an appraisal which, if correct, could spell trouble for Khrushchev, possibly before the current crisis is resolved.

ONE DANGER is that Castro may try to seize the Soviet missile bases and operate them independently of Russian wishes. However, U. S. sources maintain that while such action would be physically possible, there being only about 5000 Russians in Cuba, it is unlikely. For, as one source put it, this would be a form of suicide in view of Cuba's economic dependence on the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Cubans probably do not have the technicians to operate the bases.

Nevertheless, American officials do not rule out the possibility of such a move, pointing out that Castro "has done some strange things."

But whatever the immediate repercussions of the apparent division in opinion be-

tween Moscow and Havana, the long-range consequences could be important indeed. It might mean, for one thing, that Russia will have lost its first foothold in Latin America.

At the same time, it could also mean that Cuba will find itself abandoned by its powerful friend, which might even lose interest eventually in trying so hard to protect Cuba. As Russia's bitter squabble with Communist China and Albania has indicated, the Soviet Union usually is not in a mood to help fellow Communist states that do not take orders from Moscow.

The Cuban Communist regime might then become an easier target for its enemies, internal and external. Another possibility is that the Castro government, once abandoned by Russia, might actually try to improve relations with the United States as the only means of staying alive.

In any case, a Khrushchev-Castro split could mean the beginning of the end of communism in Cuba.